(d) No agreements were signed during the visit.

Support of China and other countries for seat in Security Council

2280. DR. AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNALAFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether China has lately indicated its intention to support India's claim for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council;

(b) whether New Zealand's Prime Minister during her recent visit to New Delhi also indicated her country's support to India's claim; and

(c) which of the 'P-5' and other countries have so far indicated their support for India's claim?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) During his recent visit to India in October 2004, China's State Councillor Mr. Tang Jiaxuan noted that China supports a bigger role for India in the international community, including in the United Nations Security Council. The Chinese side has also conveyed that priority should be given to enhancing the representation of developing countries as part of the reform of the UN Security Council.

(b) New Zealand has not articulated any position on India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

(c) Among the permanent members, France, the Russian Federation, and the UK have expressed support for India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council. Several other countries have openly expressed support for India's candidature either in the UN or in the context of bilateral exchanges. Such support is expressed in different forums and forms and it is, therefore, difficult to give a definitive number of countries which have specifically supported India.

Rail link between New Delhi and Hanoi

2281. SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the technical feasibility study for the proposed rail connectivity between New Delhi and Hanoi, agreed during the 3rd Ministerial

Meeting of the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) countries in June, 2003, has progressed during the last seventeen months;

(b) if so, the status thereof;

(c) the estimated schedule of completion of the study;

(d) the estimated schedule of completion of pre-feasibility study for the proposed rail project; and

(e) the salient features of the proposed rail link along with details of benefits expected to accrue to the people of the countries when so linked?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) Yes. As a first step, RITES Ltd. have been asked to carry out a feasibility study of the missing rail links between India and Myanmar. RITES Ltd. have completed the field study on the Myanmar side and are currently engaged in the field studies on the Indian side.

(c) and (d) The feasibility study being undertaken by RITES Ltd. is expected to be completed by January 2005.

(e) The salient features of the proposed rail link are laying of missing links and restoration/upgradation of existing links. Rail connectivity is expected to promote intra-regional trade, foster economic and social integration, facilitate movement of goods and enhance people to people contacts. This would be of particular benefit to the eastern and north-east regions of India.

Indian fishermen in Pak custody

2282 SHRI NANDI YELLAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of Indian fishermen strayed across *de-facto* Pakistan Maritime Borders as on date and still not freed from Pakistan Jails, State-wise;

(b) the details of steps taken and proposed to be taken by Government to free them from Pakistan jails; and

(c) the details of steps taken by Government to prevent such straying of innocent Indian fishermen across *de-facto* Pakistan Maritime Borders?